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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0581
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7568
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5738
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4171
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1635
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4186
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3281
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8169
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5744
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0475
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2490
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001652

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(C O R R E C T E D C O P Y) CHANGING PARA 10 MARKING TO SBU

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [AORC](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA'S RELATIONS WITH UN DETERIORATING

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The last month has seen a deterioration in the UN's already shaky relations with Sri Lanka. On November 12, JVP parliamentary floor leader Wimal Weerawansa made a speech to parliament in which he accused UNICEF of supporting the LTTE through contributions of money and vehicles. On November 26, Weerawansa made a second statement to parliament accusing UNICEF and an AmCit UNICEF employee of attempting to provide food rations and armored vehicles to the LTTE. On November 23, the Foreign Ministry asked UNICEF to take action against its staff members who allegedly participated in a demonstration in Colombo against the killing of two Red Cross workers. The UN has warned that the recent controversy over UNICEF actions in Sri Lanka could harm the working relationship between the UN and Sri Lanka. In a separate incident, the GSL has voiced strong objection to a statement by UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura condemning the Sri Lankan military's attack on the Voice of Tigers (VOT) radio station. These latest actions track closely with the GSL's record of lashing out at international organizations and diplomats, particularly those who criticize GSL actions. The Ambassador plans to support a UN request for the GSL to issue a public statement indicating it has completed its investigation into alleged UNICEF improprieties, found no wrongdoing, and has confidence in the work of UN agencies. End Summary.

JVP Accuses UNICEF AmCit of Aiding Tigers

¶2. (U) On November 12, JVP member of parliament Wimal Weerawansa made a speech to parliament in which he accused UNICEF of supporting the LTTE. He claimed that UNICEF has provided financial resources to the TRO, specifically Rs.

11,327,784 (approximately USD 105,000) between 2000 and 2006. He also said that UNICEF gave a Land Cruiser vehicle to the LTTE, and that AmCit UNICEF employee Jennifer Taylor knowingly hired a "large number of members of the Tiger organization" to fill UNICEF positions. On November 26, Weerawansa made second statement to parliament containing additional accusations against UNICEF and Taylor. He told parliament that UNICEF imported 5640 packets of ready to eat meals for the use of the LTTE. He noted that, "this kind of food is not for the consumption of civilians. Usually, this kind of food is needed for military units that engage in guerrilla warfare." Weerawansa has attributed the "smuggling of combat rations" specifically to Taylor. He also claimed that Taylor employed a local firm to armor UNICEF vehicles to be given to the LTTE. Weerawansa said UNICEF had several vehicles armored, but kept only one for its own use.

¶3. (U) The UN issued a response saying that "the consignment of Meals Ready-to-Eat (MREs) was purchased by UNICEF on behalf of 12 UN and other agencies for the use of only staff in every UN office in Sri Lanka in the event of an emergency when food might be scarce. This 'three day ration' is in accordance with global security measures stipulated by UN Headquarters, and is common practice throughout the world." According to Gordon Weiss, UNICEF spokesperson in Colombo, UNICEF has only modified one vehicle, and it is currently being used by UNICEF. Weiss also noted that UNICEF stopped working with the TRO in early 2006.

¶4. (U) The Foreign Ministry on November 23 said that UNICEF had agreed to publicize an audit of its transactions in Sri Lanka to prove there were no ongoing dealings with the TRO. Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama told parliament that UNICEF supplies being brought into the country would no longer be granted the usual diplomatic immunity from customs checks. On November 30, Sri Lankan security forces entered and placed a guard at UNICEF warehouses in Seeduwa, near the airport. UNICEF spokesman Gordon Weiss said the agency was

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notified beforehand. On December 11, UNICEF Director Phillipe Duamelle told Ambassador that Bogollagama and Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa have been understanding of the problem in private and have committed to helping resolve it. The GSL has agreed to issue a public statement reporting that the Government has investigated the matter and found no wrongdoing by UNICEF, he said. The GSL has not said when they will issue this statement. Duamelle confirmed that the UNICEF warehouses remain closed, but said UNICEF has been allowed to remove some non-MRE items.

GSL Objects to UNICEF Participation in Protest

¶5. (U) On November 23, the Foreign Ministry asked UNICEF to take action against its staff members who allegedly participated in a demonstration in Colombo against the killing of two Red Cross workers. Acting Foreign Secretary T. ¶B. Maduwegedera specifically requested that UNICEF withdraw the international officer involved in the protest and terminate the national employee, noting that participation in a demonstration was a violation of the UNICEF mandate. The UN office in Colombo is conducting its own investigation into the allegations that some of its staff members participated in the protest. According to Weiss, the investigation and any necessary sanctions will be carried out by the end of December.

UN Warns of Damaged Relationship

¶6. (U) The UN has warned that the recent controversy over UNICEF actions in Sri Lanka could harm the working relationship between the UN and Sri Lanka. A UN statement on November 26 said that "In the estimation of the UN, this false impression undermines the security of every UN staff

member, obstructs the implementation of basic development projects for all Sri Lankans, erodes the confidence of donor governments, and damages the generally excellent working relationship of the UN and the government." Neil Buhne, UN Resident Representative in Colombo, reiterated in a press statement on November 28 that, "Groundless public accusations can seriously compromise our ability to carry out humanitarian and development work and are also putting the safety and security of UN staff and NGO partners at risk."

GSL Demands Retraction of UNESCO Statement

¶17. (U) The GSL has voiced strong objection to a statement by UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura condemning the Sri Lankan military's attack on the Voice of Tigers (VOT) radio station. Matsuura's statement said, "regardless of the content of the broadcasts aired by the Voice of Tigers, there can be no excuse for military strikes on civilian media. Such action contravenes the Geneva Convention..." Sri Lanka's Ambassador in France and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO Chitranganee Wagiswara delivered a letter of protest from the GSL to the DG demanding a retraction of the statement. The letter notes that as a mouthpiece for the LTTE, the VOT is not a legitimate civilian radio station. It also says the DG's reference in his statement to the "Geneva Convention" is out of context since there is no war or confrontation between two sovereign states in Sri Lanka. On December 5, Foreign Minister Bogollagama told parliament that "Sri Lanka will not permit any international organization to be a vehicle for the LTTE by justifying its modes of operation" and said the Ministry would "exercise all means...to ensure that such statements are retracted or corrections made by the relevant agencies and authorities in the international arena." On December 6, Bogollagama made another statement in Parliament

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announcing a criminal investigation against UNICEF's importation of the rations and demanding the withdrawal of any international staff who had participated in demonstrations.

Comment and Next Steps

¶18. (SBU) These latest controversies have had an adverse impact not only on the activities and employees of UN agencies in Sri Lanka, but also on all international NGOs working in Sri Lanka. In a December 12 meeting with AID Director and Ambassador, international NGO representatives reported that their Tamil staff in particular feel increasingly exposed and some NGOs have had greater difficulty recruiting new staff as a result of these latest incidents. Others report greater scrutiny of national and international staff at GSL checkpoints, particularly on the roads near LTTE-controlled areas.

¶19. (SBU) Ironically, it has only been a few weeks since the government plastered Colombo with posters congratulating itself on getting Education Minister Susil Premajantha elected to the UNESCO board. These latest attacks on the UN are consistent with the GSL's record of failing to first investigate allegations before lashing out at international organizations and diplomats, especially those who criticize GSL actions. This has been a particular popular practice in the over-heated atmosphere surrounding this year's budget debates when the GSL has been eager to curry favor with the nationalist JVP. UNICEF, in particular, offended the Government by citing the Sri Lankan military for its complicity in child recruitment by the LTTE-breakaway "Karuna group." Jennifer Taylor and her husband, a USAID employee, are in the process of moving out of the country on the recommendation of UN security.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador has expressed concern to the GSL that Taylor was publicly named before any investigation had taken

place thereby endangering her security and that of her family, which the GSL acknowledged was wrong. The Ambassador will also support at the December 13 Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Affairs meeting the UN request for the GSL to issue a public statement indicating it has completed its investigation into alleged UNICEF improprieties, found no wrongdoing, and has confidence in the work of UN agencies. Such a statement would go a long way to repairing the damage that has been caused.

BLAKE